

## PLANNING FOR PORTLAND'S WORKING WATERFRONT

*Sallie Edmunds, City of Portland Oregon, Bureau of Planning*

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### INTRODUCTION

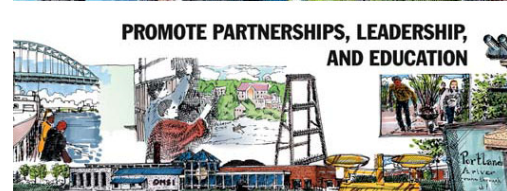
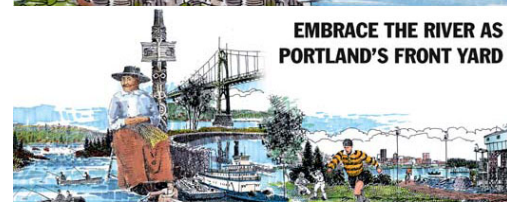
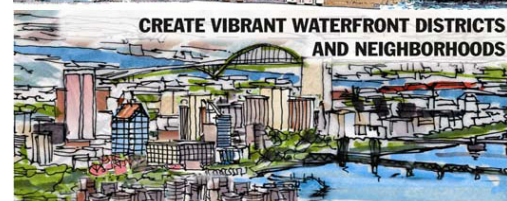
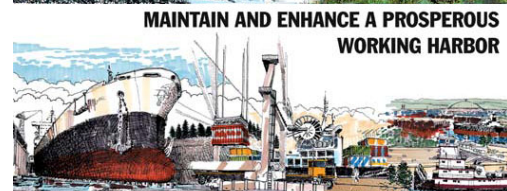
The Willamette River is the heart of Portland's history, landscape, economy, and culture. The river and its tributary streams provide a connection with nature in the midst of a thriving urban area and a world-class port. But the Willamette River also faces great challenges today: sewer and stormwater overflows threaten water quality; toxic sediments in the river have resulted in a Superfund designation of the Portland Harbor; Chinook salmon and steelhead trout are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act; Portland's riverfront industrial areas are constrained due to contamination and land supply; demand is growing for riverfront parks and recreational facilities; and access to the river from adjacent neighborhoods is in many locations difficult or even impossible.

### River Renaissance

In the year 2000, the City of Portland launched River Renaissance, an ambitious journey toward reclaiming the Willamette River as Portland's centerpiece and chief economic, environmental and social asset. This vision emerged from a broad community dialogue with over 1000 Portlanders. At the heart of River Renaissance is the belief that exciting urban communities, a vital and healthy river, and a sustainable economy are complementary goals.

The Portland City Council enthusiastically endorsed the *River Renaissance Vision* (2001) proclaiming Portland's aspirations to:

- ensure a *clean and healthy river* system for fish, wildlife, and people,
- maintain and enhance the city's *prosperous working harbor*,
- embrace the river and its banks as *Portland's front yard*,
- create *vibrant waterfront districts and neighborhoods*, and
- achieve these goals through *partnerships, leadership and education*.

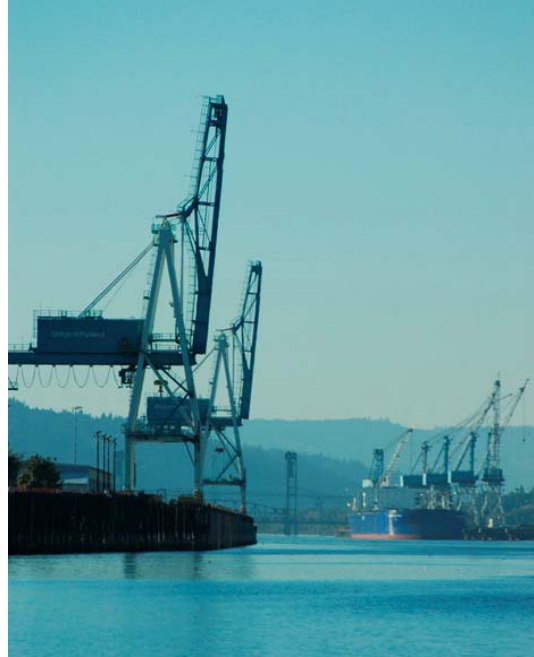




implemented through public and private actions. Mitigation required of public and private parties will improve habitat functions.

### **Prosperous Working Harbor**

- Retention of harbor industrial land will be coordinated with transportation and economic development investments, to capitalize on this unique location at the convergence of Oregon's primary rail, road, water, and pipeline infrastructure.
- The industrial riverfront will remain primarily in industrial sanctuary uses that are dependent on, or benefit from, a riverfront location.
- In addition to supporting target industries and established district character, the City will seek industries that contribute to a "circular economy" in which the wastes of one business are reused as inputs by another, supporting both economic efficiency and environmental health.
- Brownfields and unoccupied sites will be recycled into productive use through public and private investment and partnerships while pursuing polluter liability for cleanup costs. In the harbor area, these uses will be predominately industrial.



### **Vibrant Waterfront Districts and Neighborhoods**

- The St. Johns neighborhood and nearby industrial areas will become more compatible through the improved site and building design of residential development, voluntary "good neighbor" practices, and new infrastructure projects. These actions will help alleviate light and noise conflicts.

### **Portland's Front Yard**

- A bikeway and pedestrian system will continue through the North Reach using off-street trails, on-street bicycle lanes, and sidewalks. In addition, a new bike and pedestrian path will be constructed connecting the east and west sides of the river utilizing the existing St. Johns Bridge, the railroad bridge, or a new bridge crossing the Willamette.
- Over time, using a variety of tools, a continuous trail will be developed along both sides of the Willamette River that complements the existing and planned riverfront uses and recognizes the vital contribution that river-proximate industrial uses make to Portland's economy.

### **Partnerships, Leadership, and Education**



- The City will seek incentives, community partnerships, and facilitated development processes to encourage property owners and others to achieve the River Renaissance Vision.
- The City will strive to make its regulations flexible, streamlined, and cost-effective and work with other agencies to simplify the overall river related regulatory process.

## **THE RIVER PLANNING PROCESS**

The River Plan process has and will continue to include extensive public participation. City staff convene stakeholder task groups to delve into the details of the various topics such as trail alignment, watershed health, industrial land policy, and coordination with state and federal agencies responsible for the clean up of superfund and brownfield sites.



Staff also report monthly to a seven member River Plan Committee that is chaired by the Vice President of the Portland Planning Commission. In addition, staff meets regularly with property owners, neighborhood associations, advocacy groups, agency staff and interested Portlanders. An extensive website, a monthly email newsletter and participation at river related events also help keep the lines of communication open.

## **KEY ISSUES**

As with any planning process, there are many intertwined issues that must be addressed. Following are some key issues that are currently under discussion and need to be resolved in the final plan:

- What measures can the City take to help recruit and retain sustainable industries that provide family wage jobs? Portland's industrial sanctuary has been effective in maintaining a land supply suitable for long-term investments by industry but uncertainty associated with contamination, development pressures from higher value land uses, proximity to less compatible land uses, and limited land supply may lead some businesses to locate elsewhere.
- How should the City's watershed health goals be reflected on industrial sites? Should regulatory protections be applied to areas with medium and high ranking natural resource functions and values? What kinds of incentives can the City provide to encourage industrial property owners to protect and restore natural resources?



- Should off site mitigation and restoration for past and current natural resource damages be allowed? Could a conservation banking program be a key component of an integrated plan, resulting in an increase in watershed health and a prosperous industrial climate? If so, what is the best way to structure this in a regulatory climate that includes Superfund, ESA listed fish as well as state and regional regulations?
- Contaminated site clean up is done under the oversight of either the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality or the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Since neither agency is required to follow the City's regulatory process, how can the City help to ensure that long term clean up remedies will allow Portland to achieve its vision for the Willamette River?
- Bicycle and pedestrian routes are important components of the transportation infrastructure in this bicycle friendly city. How should Portland modify its trail requirements to comply with the U. S. Supreme Court Case *Dolan vs. City of Tigard*? What types of incentives are available to encourage reluctant property owners to help build this alternative transportation network?
- Permitting on the Willamette River is complicated. While not regulated by the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Willamette River in Portland is regulated by the City of Portland, the Metro Regional Government, Multnomah County, the State of Oregon (e.g., Land Conservation and Development, State Lands, Environmental Quality, Marine Board), and the U.S. government (e.g., Corps of Engineers, Coast Guard, NOAA Fisheries). Are any of the seemingly overlapping regulations truly duplicative or are they all needed? Would a multi-jurisdictional team approach to permitting improve the process?

## **IN SEARCH OF THE OPTIMAL SOLUTION**

City staff and stakeholders are committed to developing a River Plan that addresses the River Renaissance Vision themes and principles and complies with the River Concept. We are now at the critical stage of finding integrated solutions to address the multitude of issues.



Find out how far has Portland has progressed by attending the Winds of Change: Managing Working Waterfronts panel.

Sallie Edmunds, River Planning Manager  
City of Portland, Bureau of Planning  
1900 SW 4th Avenue Portland, OR 97201  
phone 503-823-6950 fax 503-823-7800  
sedmunds@ci.portland.or.us